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NEWS RELEASE

Oct. 13, 2005

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UM RADIO-TELEVISION DEPARTMENT HOSTS AFRICAN JOURNALISTS

MISSOULA—

Two African journalists will visit The University of Montana campus this month to explore the role of the media in democracy.

John Mwendwa Gitari and Martin Ochioli will spend several days on campus and in media outlets around Missoula as part of their ongoing research at the Kettering Foundation. They will be hosted by Assistant Professor Denise Dowling of UM's Department of Radio-Television. Dowling also conducts research for the foundation.

The journalists will spend time at radio and television newsrooms in Missoula, exploring how traditional newsroom practices might be changed to help citizens and public officials work together on common problems affecting their countries. While in Missoula, the journalists also will speak with students in the classroom.

Gitari is the associate editor of the Kenyan Television Network. He has worked as a television journalist for six years, covering political and human rights issues in East Africa. In 2002, he was named the African Journalist of the Year by CNN for a documentary he produced on street children in Nairobi.

In his research at the Kettering Foundation, Gitari is exploring the role of Kenyan journalists in the country's newly emerging democracy. The press in Kenya played a critical role in pushing for democratic reform and the country's first truly fair and open elections in 2002. But public disillusionment with both democracy and the press has been mounting.

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public disillusionment with both democracy and the press has been mounting.

While political persecution – the arrest, beating and murder of journalists – gave the media in Kenya widespread public support in the past, their newfound political freedoms have left them more open to criticism. Many Kenyan citizens no longer feel that the media accurately represent their views or that its traditional watchdog approach to covering the news is aiding the country's development.

Gitari also has covered issues such as land reform in Zimbabwe and has interviewed President Robert Mugabe and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai. He is the author of "Gospel on a Camel's Back," a biography of the nomadic East African missionary Andrew Adano. In addition, he has worked with the World Health Organization and held the UNESCO Chair at the University of Nairobi in 2002.

Ochioli is founder and president of the Media Development and Research Trust, a Nairobi-based organization that trains journalists and conducts research on the link between journalism and democracy. He also is the coordinator of UNESCO's Kenya National Information and Communication Policy Project that works with journalists and officials to improve government efficiency, accountability and transparency.

Ochioli has worked as a television journalist in both Kenya and the Soviet Union and organized a variety of seminars and training modules for journalists in both East and West Africa. He also has worked with the U.N. agency to develop a regional information service on HIV/AIDS. Before joining the United Nations, he spent three years with the International Federation of Journalists, serving as the coordinator of its East African Program and heading the Media for Democracy in Africa Project.

Ochioli's research for the Kettering Foundation focuses on understanding the impact of public and citizen journalism on public life in the United States. Through conversations with journalists and scholars as well as readings and case studies, Ochioli hopes to better understand

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the role of journalism at large in American democracy and how that role may be applicable to the needs and interests of African journalists.

While in Missoula, Gitari and Ochioli will observe the work being done on The Footbridge Forum, an experimental radio show that airs on KBGA, UM's college radio station. The forum brings together campus and community members to solve problems affecting UM and the greater Missoula area.

In the past, the forum has tackled issues such as alcohol abuse, housing costs and campus development. This semester students are exploring the challenges faced by American Indian students pursuing higher education. The next forum airs on KBGA, at 89.9 FM, from 7 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 19.

Gitari and Ochioli are here through the Fanning Fellowship for Journalism and Democracy program, which brings working journalists and journalism scholars to the Kettering Foundation for six months to explore the link between journalism and democracy. Fellows participate in foundation meetings and conduct their own original research on issues of relevance to democracy and the press in their own native countries.

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